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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001037

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-SECESSION LAW: BALANCING GAME

REF: A. TAIPEI 956
B. TAIPEI 992 (NOTAL)

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (S) Summary: Taiwan National Security Council (NSC) officials tell AIT that President Chen Shui-bian believes the USG's public reaction to the PRC Anti-Secession Law draft will help moderate public demands for a strong official response from Taipei. Nevertheless, officials say there remains strong pressure from the President's Pan-Green base for Chen to lead a planned March 26 mass rally called by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to protest the PRC law. People First Party (PFP) officials warn that if Chen takes part in the demonstration, it will make further cooperation with the Chen administration impossible. In order to address the requirements of both parties, and at the same time send a clear signal to Beijing, AIT has encouraged the Presidential Office and PFP to react to the PRC's expected March 14 passage of the law by announcing a plan for enhancing Taiwan's defense capabilities, including through accelerated legislative action on the Special Defense Procurement Budget. PFP and Presidential Office officials have agreed to discuss this proposal within the next two days. End Summary.

USG Cover

¶2. (C) Chen administration officials expressed appreciation for USG statements on March 8 and 9 over the Anti-Secession Law. NSC Senior Advisor for political affairs Lin Jin-chang told AIT that President Chen was particularly pleased at the robust U.S. response. Lin said that the President believes the USG statements will help him resist pressures from within his political base to take a strong reaction. In light of the U.S. reaction, and the contents of the draft law, Lin said the NSC has been able to hold the line established before the March 8 release of the text (Ref A). However, Lin complained that other senior officials, including Vice President Annette Lu and Premier Frank Hsieh, have strayed from the NSC-established line in their public commentary on the new law.

¶3. (C) Lin's cross-Straits counterpart, NSC Senior Advisor for cross-Straits affairs Chen Chung-hsin, told AIT that the Mainland Affairs Council's (MAC) shrill public reaction on March 9 has been particularly unfortunate. Chen noted that MAC "declined" the NSC's suggestion that it offer a measured response to PRC National People's Congress (NPC) Vice Chairman Wang Zhaoguo's March 8 explanation of the proposed law. (Comment: MAC also rejected the same suggestions from AIT citing the need to respond to domestic pressure, Ref B. End Comment.) Chen added that there are still differences between the NSC and MAC leadership over the draft law's contents. He told AIT that Taiwan still objects to certain elements of the law, particularly its wide definition of actions that would provoke a "non-peaceful" response (Article 8) and its formulation over the relationship between China and Taiwan (Article 2).

¶4. (C) In contrast, MAC Chairman Joseph Wu told AIT there was no substantive difference between the March 8 "explanation" given by NPC Vice Chair Wang and the draft law text obtained by the Taiwan media. "Sure there are lots of positive things in the text," he commented, "but they are totally overshadowed by the non-peaceful methods portion."

President Chen Silent... for the Moment

¶5. (C) Despite a series of strongly-worded public statements by the Premier and Vice President on March 8-9, the NSC's Lin told AIT that the President himself will withhold public commentary on the Anti-Secession Law until March 14, when Taipei expects the NPC to take action. Lin disputed media reports that Chen has decided to lead a proposed mass rally on March 26 organized by DPP headquarters. Lin asserted that Chen has urged the DPP to tone down its themes for the rally, replacing "Anti-Annexation Law" themes with slogans such as "peace" and "democracy." Presidential Office Secretary Liu Shih-chung told AIT that DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang will meet with Chen again soon to raise the President's participation in the rally, but emphasized that there has been no formal deliberations over the matter.

PFP: March 26 Rally is a Dealbreaker

16. (C) PFP Policy Chief (and Legislator) Vincent Chang (Hsien-yao) told AIT party Chairman James Soong is deeply worried over the March 26 DPP rally. "If Chen leads the march, there is no way Soong can maintain his recent cooperation with the President," Chang asserted. Chang, who co-chairs the PFP-Presidential Office working group with Presidential Deputy Secretary General James Huang, said the PFP does not welcome the PRC's new law, but maintains that Taiwan should avoid a harsh response in order to reduce chances for a cycle of provocations and counter-provocations over the issue. He added that PFP supporters could not accept Soong's continued alignment with the DPP if Chen were to be seen as returning to the provocative nationalistic themes of the past three years.

AIT: A Good Defense is a Good Defense

17. (S) Noting that both Chen and Soong are facing conflicting pressures from within their respective political bases, AIT separately urged Chang and Huang to consider have Chen and Soong issue a joint response on March 14. AIT suggested that the two leaders publicly state their opposition to the use of force in the Taiwan Strait and back this up by offering a timetable to accelerate Taiwan's defense modernization, including through expedited passage of the Special Defense Procurement Budget. In this way, Chen could show his fundamentalist supporters that his alliance with Soong has enhanced, rather than damaged, Taiwan's security. In a similar vein, Soong could also claim credit for heading off a more provocative Taiwan response. AIT noted that such an initiative would also demonstrate to both Beijing and Washington Taiwan's resolve to defend itself in a non-provocative way. The PFP's Chang briefed the idea to Soong on March 10 and secured his full agreement to negotiate with the Presidential Office on the issue. The same day, Huang told AIT he would also brief President Chen, but said he had no doubt that the President would fully endorse this approach. Huang and Chang are scheduled to discuss the issue on the evening of March 10.

Comment: Cooler Heads, For Now

18. (C) Washington's quick public reaction on the Anti-Secession Law appears to have bought moderate Chen advisors some breathing room. AIT will continue to encourage a measured response from Taipei, especially in the run-up to the President's planned "formal" response on March 14. Whether Chen and Soong can use the issue to formulate a unified response may depend on Chen's ability to resist Pan-Green calls for his participation in the March 26 rally. Uncoordinated statements from the Vice President, Premier, and MAC Chair have not made this task any easier. AIT will continue to urge Chen's advisors to cast the President as the responsible voice of reason.

PAAL